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SUBJ: MINISTERS CITE MEASURABLE RESULTS IN AFGHAN MISSION

REF: Ottawa 1903

11. (SBU) Summary: Foreign Minister Bernier and International Development Minister Oda appeared before the House of Commons' Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committee on December 11 to describe progress in Afghanistan. The ministers insisted that the resolve of NATO partners is strong, that development efforts are yielding measurable results, and that Canada is "well on track" to reaching its goals of stability, good governance, and lasting peace in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, with the Manley Panel's report on Canada's future role in Afghanistan (reftel) due in late January, the government and the opposition are preparing for what could be the most contentious parliamentary debates of 2008. End summary.

NATO COMMITTED, ARMY AND POLICE ON TRACK

12. (U) Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier told the parliamentarians that NATO's commitment to the Afghan mission remains "very strong" and that NATO partners at the December 6-7 NATO Foreign Ministerial in Brussels were "united in the conviction" that there could be no reconstruction without security. He said that Canada's 350-person Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kandahar is yielding results in training of police, developing justice capacity, and promoting governance.

13. (U) Canada will take the military lead in Regional Command South (RC-S) from February 2008 and Canadian Forces are "well on track" to reaching their goal of training the Afghan army and increasing its capacity to mount independent actions, according to Bernier. Canada is also taking a comprehensive approach to reform of the Afghan police, and providing strategic advice, equipment, salaries, and uniforms, as well as building infrastructure (such as police sub-stations), mentoring, and training, he added. Forty-six Canadian civilian and Military Police trainers are currently on the ground in Kandahar. Between 2002 and 2008, Canada will contribute a total of \$39.8 million in wages for the Afghan police.

RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT DELIVERS RESULTS

14. (U) Minister Beverley Oda announced that in 2008 the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will increase the number of its field staff in Kandahar to 35. Under the terms of the Afghan Compact, she said, Canada will spend \$1.2 billion on reconstruction aid for Afghanistan by 2011. Both ministers cited "significant achievements" and "real results" in Canada's efforts to promote access to education and basic health care in Afghanistan, particularly for women and girls. They also noted that Canada had recently increased its already significant contribution to de-mining by an additional \$80 million over four years.

NEARING ANOTHER VOTE

¶5. (U) Regarding the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan, Minister Bernier said that the government is committed to holding another vote in the Commons in 2008, but that the government does not believe that Canada should abandon Afghanistan after 2009. He said the government wants the debate to be "as non-partisan as possible" and denied that the government had already made up its mind and is "gearing up" to impose its vision on Parliament. He stated the government's action on this issue has been "transparent and clear," that -- in a minority position -- the government will have to listen to opposition parties, and that it would carefully consider the advice of all MPs and of the independent Manley panel, Qconsider the advice of all MPs and of the independent Manley panel, and arrive at a consensus in the House of Commons.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) Ministers Bernier and Oda's briefings were firmly "on message," insisting that the Afghan mission is yielding measurable results, that development is happening, and that the mission's balance of development and security will improve as the security situation stabilizes. Probably to the disappointment of the government, there was little or no significant press coverage of these positive iterations about the accomplishments of the current mission. Both parliamentarians and the public may be looking more toward the recommendations of the Manley Panel (due in late January), although many opposition MPs have told us privately that nothing the panel could propose would change their parties' positions on the future of the Afghan mission. Expectations are that the debates in the Foreign Affairs Committee and in the full House on the next resolution about the fate of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan after February 2009 will be heated and have the potential to spark the most divisive Parliamentary discussions in ¶2008.

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